

University of Louisville

## ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

---

Faculty Scholarship

---

Fall 2013

**A bridge over troubled waters : jazz, diaspora discourse, and E. B. Dongala's "Jazz and palm wine" as response to Amiri Baraka's "Answers in progress".**

Ann Elizabeth Willey  
*University of Louisville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/faculty>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Music Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

---

### Original Publication Information

Willey, A. "A Bridge over Troubled Waters: Jazz, Diaspora Discourse, and E. B. Dongala's "Jazz and Palm Wine" as Response to Amiri Baraka's "Answers in Progress"." 2013. *Research in African Literatures*, 44(3): 138-151.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact [thinkir@louisville.edu](mailto:thinkir@louisville.edu).

# A Bridge over Troubled Waters: Jazz, Diaspora Discourse, and E. B. Dongala's "Jazz and Palm Wine" as Response to Amiri Baraka's "Answers in Progress"

ANN WILLEY  
University of Louisville  
aewilley@louisville.edu

## ABSTRACT

This essay explores how Emmanuel Dongala's story "Jazz and Palm Wine" (1970) rewrites Imiri Baraka's story "Answers in Progress" (1967). Baraka's story calls for a black revolution based in futurist thinking and diaspora consciousness embodied in jazz. In rewriting Baraka, Dongala resists discourses of coherent and stable identity through a recasting of the aesthetic functions of futurism and jazz. Dongala's intertextual use of, and emendations to, Baraka's story suggest his discomfort with articulations of diaspora identity that, in the late 60s, were increasingly defined by cultural symbols. In transposing Baraka's futurist fable of the revolution to the African continent, Dongala stresses that while aesthetic objects, even ones as universally appealing as jazz, can be equally *affective* in different contexts, those contexts generate dramatically different *effects*.

When the spaceships come, to whose leader will the aliens want to talk? And who will they save from destruction? For Amiri Baraka, the aliens will only come after the black man has saved himself and the only cat they'll want to talk to is Art Blakey. But when Emmanuel Dongala tells the story, the aliens will install themselves as your leaders and they will only talk to those who bring them palm wine. And while Dongala and Baraka share a jazz soundtrack, its effect on the audiences, terrestrial and extraterrestrial, is markedly different. "Jazz and Palm Wine" begins with a quote from Baraka, "The next day

the spaceships landed. Art Blakey records is what they were looking for," the first line of Baraka's story "Answers in Progress," published in 1967 under the name Leroi Jones. In rewriting Baraka's story, Dongala transposes it from an imagined post-revolutionary Newark to a post-independence West Africa and, in doing so, makes clear his sympathetic but ambivalent engagement with rhetorics of African diasporic identity through a revaluing of jazz. Dongala's revisioning of Baraka destabilizes common tropes of diaspora identity and privileges political over cultural affiliations.

Dongala's rewriting of Baraka reformulates several key elements of "Answers in Progress": its implicit definitions of Afrofuturism, the signification of revolution, and the limits of cultural and political sources of diaspora identity. Baraka's iteration necessarily comprises universality—there is only one Afrofuturism and it draws Africa and America together through the diaspora. If the American uprising is to be truly universal (by which Baraka means galactic), it must be formulated through a necessary and essential link to Africa—the birthplace of humanity—the past and the future encapsulated in the present moment of the revolution.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Baraka exemplifies the larger trend in formulations of an African diaspora identity as encapsulated in the American Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and the Afrofuturisms of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which heavily emphasized the cultural connections between Africa and her diaspora and imbued those cultural movements with revolutionary potential.

In his discussion of the roots of Afrofuturism, Tejumola Olaniyan suggests that the 1970s was marked by a shift away from political understandings of diaspora identity in favor of a more cultural understanding of "black identity."<sup>2</sup> Baraka's late 60s story "Answers in Progress," with its faith in the messianic power of jazz to inspire revolutionary social awareness, bears this out. But Dongala, in rewriting Baraka, resists this shift, privileging instead a more pragmatic, political understanding of the reality on the ground. In other words, Dongala replaces Baraka's aesthetic revolution with a distinctly political fable of his own. Where Baraka stakes a claim for jazz as a literally universal mode of expressing the future of an essentialized African personality, Dongala locates his analysis of identity formation and social architecture firmly within local, lived realities. Dongala divorces jazz from Baraka's explanatory or emancipatory function and reclassifies it as an affective tool that can encapsulate shared feelings but that cannot translate them into action in any predetermined way.<sup>3</sup>

"Jazz and Palm Wine" is the title story of a collection that Dongala published in 1982, seven years after his first novel (*Un Fusil dans la main, une poème dans la poche*, 1975). He had just returned to Brazzaville after spending nine years in the United States. The anthology brings together Dongala's attraction to and admiration for African American culture during the 1960s, especially East Coast jazz, and pointed critiques of the oppressive regime under which Congolese citizens of the 60s and 70s lived. In bringing together these two themes, Dongala encourages readers to make connections between the African American struggle for self-expression and civil rights and the Congolese citizen's struggle with an increasingly autocratic one-party state. Though the government of the Congo quickly moved to censor these stories of fascination and despair, the collection was and continues to be widely read throughout Africa, according to Dongala.<sup>4</sup> Despite this wide circulation, it has received little scholarly attention, relative to

his novels, and has yet to be translated into English.<sup>5</sup> The harshly critical descriptions of Congolese society provide readily comprehensible grounds for the official reaction to the collection, but the critical inattention to the stories is harder to understand. The relevant scholarship is limited to passing references in interviews, a 71-page *explication du texte*/primer on the collection by Sewanou Dabla, and part of a chapter in Dominic Thomas's study of Congolese fiction, *Nation-Building and Propaganda in Francophone Africa*.

Even when the stories do garner critical attention, as in Thomas's book, the title story receives short shrift. Thomas dedicates a chapter to Dongala's work, describing him as one of Congo's "unofficial" writers, an author who is invested in a particular national chronotope, but not as a supporter of the state apparatus that seeks to define and control that time and space. According to Thomas, unofficial authors deploy mythic elements from the nation's shared past to critique the state's will to power. An unofficial writer speaks for the groups that make up an agglomeration of peoples that the state is trying its damndest to turn into a "nation" writ large. In discussing Dongala's collection of short stories, Thomas admires its ability to take on the public space of the Congo while critiquing the official apparatus that created it. Though Thomas spends almost half of the chapter discussing this collection, he focuses on how the first five stories portray the impact of postcolonial autocracies on everyday life of ordinary citizens, devoting just a scant paragraph to the title story. In two or three other places, he refers to "Jazz and Palm Wine" as a "bridge" between the first five stories, set in Africa, and the last two, which are set in America. In support for his description of the title story as a "bridge," Thomas cites a remark Dongala made in an interview: "There are two parts to this collection, one that takes place in Africa and one that takes place in the United States. On the one side, jazz and on the other, palm wine which symbolizes an African façade for me" (qtd. in Thomas 143). Thomas goes on to quote both Bhabha and Glissant about the uses of "bridges" in diaspora discourse, connecting his reading of Dongala with contemporary postcolonial theorizing.

Where Thomas focuses on Dongala's explanation of the dual nature of the collection, what goes unremarked is the latter's use of the word *façade*, an explicit warning against accepting symbols of African identity for stable signifiers. And the little critical attention the stories have generated seems to do just this. Sewanou Dabla, for example, argues that the title of the collection indicates stories that "move from symbol to symbol," implying that Dongala asserts a structural connection between African and African American semiotics. Jazz and palm wine are indeed symbols, but symbols are often unstable things. The collection certainly evidences Dongala's interest in thinking about the connections between Africa and African America, but the stories do not create stable identities, transcendental signifiers if you will, on either bank of a river. And the title story, which invokes markers of both American and African identity, is arguably the least stable offering in the collection—more like a Galloping Gertie than a Golden Gate. When fully unraveled, in fact, the title story looks more like a fast flowing river than a bridge that connects two stable banks. In its heightened diaspora consciousness and its deployment of overly signifying tropes, "Jazz and Palm Wine" is a complex warning not to accept facades for realities, not to engage in the kind of mythologizing that creates totalizing identities.

The story signals its desire to engage and complicate diaspora consciousness in several ways: 1) it is a clear rewriting of a short story by Amiri Baraka,<sup>6</sup> inviting studies like Koffi Anyinefa's that address Dongala's use of intertextuality; 2) it transposes Baraka's story to the African continent, echoing the complex, mutually constructed dialectic of African and diaspora identity at the center of Dongala's first novel (*fusil/poème*); and 3) it belongs to the genre of science fiction, which allows Dongala to explore a genre deeply significant for American culture in the 1960s, but one that is relatively untrammelled ground in African letters.<sup>7</sup> Tying together all these concerns, intertextuality, diaspora identity, and genre, is the trope of jazz. In its affective appeal on both the African and North American continents, jazz does, indeed, link the African diaspora, but Dongala insists that it arrives back on African shores with a political difference.

Dongala's investment in African American culture, particularly music, as both a cultural discourse and a mode of understanding diaspora identities is not surprising, given that he spent 1960 to 1969 in the United States, during the height of the black power movement, the burgeoning of black cultural nationalism, and the eruption of "free jazz" on the musical scene.<sup>8</sup> Dongala recounts in several interviews how entranced he was with the cultural movement of the 60s and how he used to pass his weekends in Greenwich Village soaking in the scene (Brezault and Clavreuil 136; Michaels). This is also likely the time when many of the stories in his collection were first drafted. Although it first appeared in 1982, the title story had been published much earlier, in 1970. The seventh story in the collection, "Mon métro fantôme," had been published previously as well and, according to Dongala, is a rewriting of Baraka's play "The Dutchman" (originally translated into French as "Un Métro fantôme").<sup>9</sup> Two others begin with epigraphs from Amiri Baraka (the first story and the sixth, title, story) and the eighth and final story, "A Love Supreme," is a first-person narrative set in New York City that recounts the narrator's reaction to the news of John Coltrane's death (1967).

But does transposing an African American fable set in New Jersey to an African setting indicate a significant shift in focus or does it simply reimagine Baraka's tale in a new space? In order to think through the implications of Dongala's rewriting of Baraka, a fuller explication of the ways Baraka's story uses both jazz and science fiction to create liberated spaces is needed. "Answers in Progress" is utopian speculative fiction that imagines what a post-revolution black Newark would look like to both the protagonist, an African American revolutionary, and to visitors from outer space.<sup>10</sup> Although set in a contemporary time—Baraka dates the composition of the story to March 1967—it is future-oriented in its anticipation of the black revolution and its imagining how the black population of Newark might establish a new national truth for themselves. The aliens that come to observe them provide witness to their positive evolution. These blue aliens—a reference perhaps to his own theoretical work that names African Americans as the blues people—come to earth searching for Art Blakely records, but quickly discover that jazz has moved on to the space-based consciousness of Sun Ra, a cosmic soul brother who aggressively merges symbols of the past (ancient Egypt) with those of the future (space travel). They discover that not only has music evolved, but so has the social cosmos—the black revolution is underway. While anonymous white people stagger throughout the streets of Newark dying, trying to escape the burning bastions of capitalism, the aliens and the soul brothers look on, comparing

notes about what is happening in other cities and deciding how they will tell their story in their evening newspapers. The national scope of the revolution is made clear when the Newark group checks in with the Chicago group, where “fires were still as high as buildings,” while fires similarly consume the flagship Bamberger’s department store in Newark. Paul Youngquist summarizes the main thrust of Baraka’s story: “Black music ruptures the space of white domination and lets in the cool blue spacemen homing in on the signal of Art Blakey. . . . Music becomes a way of materializing new spaces, producing the future, not as some distant never-never land, but in (the) place of today” (339).<sup>11</sup>

Baraka’s story imagines the black revolution of the near future driven by a jazz soundtrack and sanctioned by an extraterrestrial audience. As noted above, Baraka dates the story to March 1967, a scant three months before a series of very real racial protests shook the city of Newark, closing it down for six days. Baraka’s speculative fiction took the growing tensions in the Newark community and anticipated a revolution that would leave the black population in control of the government, streets, prisons, TV stations, theaters, and even a redesign of the American flag. On their new national flag, Baraka’s revolutionary heroes change the white stars on a blue field to “black heads, black hearts, and blue fiery space” (132), alluding both to Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolutionary gesture of ripping the white out of the French flag to create the Haitian flag and to Marcus Garvey’s iconic call for a return to Africa through the Black Star Line.<sup>12</sup> But Baraka’s revolutionary black star shines farther than Ghana—it has a direct line to space via jazz. The blanks, the only noun used to refer to the whites of Newark, are rounded up, slaughtered, or “nationalized” to a jazz soundtrack. The blue people from outer space and the blues people from the US of A concur that an important leap in cosmic evolution has taken place: the protagonist is unperturbed by the fact that the other-worldly blue brothers need to be brought up to speed, to move beyond Art Blakey in favor of the music of Sun Ra that promises emancipation. Their need for musical evolution is counter-balanced by their ratification of the death of the blanks as evolution:

And right in the middle, playing the Sun ra [sic] tape, the blanks staggered out of the department store. Omar had missed finishing the job, and they staggered out, falling in the snow, red all over the face, the stab wounds in one in the top of a Adam hat. The Space men thought that’s what was really happening. One beeped (Ali mentioned this in the newspapers) that this was evolution. (127–28)

For Baraka, emancipation=revolution=evolution and can only occur after the old is burned down. In describing the Newark rebellion in his autobiography, Baraka asserts, “For me, the rebellion was a cleansing fire” (qtd. in Youngquist 337).

Baraka’s story here entwines science fiction, or Afrofuturism, with jazz in ways that many of his critics argue is a logical outgrowth of his belief that music is the central trope of African American life.<sup>13</sup> Baraka’s first major study of music argued that African Americans were the people of the blues, that a close examination of the blues would reveal “the essential nature of the negro’s existence in this country” (qtd. in Ellison 279), a claim that Ralph Ellison treats dismissively, punning, “the tremendous weight of sociology that Jones would place on this music is enough to give even the blues the blues” (Ellison 279). But Baraka, in his

early writing, asserted that music is the quintessential cultural record of African American life. It follows that African American musical innovation could also open up the path to the future.

The appeal to science fiction is perhaps less obvious, but the cultural air of the 1960s was full of references to science and black cultural nationalist movements were no exception. From Coltrane to Sun Ra, African American musicians were appealing to scientific imagery to extol their modernness, to proclaim their future-oriented aesthetics in the here and now. As several scholars of Afrofuturism note, this gesture of embodying emancipated space through the trope of science fiction is neither new nor surprising.<sup>14</sup> Paul Gilroy, for example, suggests that science fiction is one way to mark the emancipatory moment when “the present ends and the future commences” (332) and further, that, especially in the American context, futurism represents a salient challenge to white supremacy. As Gilroy explains, “denying the future and the right to be future oriented became an integral part of the way white supremacism functioned during and after the slave system” (337). What better way, then, to mark black liberation than to engage in the most far-out futurisms possible?

The continual evolution of music as an expression of African American experiences becomes one venue for insisting on a future-oriented culture. That blues turns into jazz and bebop into “free jazz” is, for Baraka, just one more way in which the African American universe outstrips the willpower of the white hegemonic structure and invites the knowledgeable listener to participate in the emancipatory work of imagining a future in the here and now. Baraka writes in his autobiography, “The new music began by calling itself free and this is social and is in direct commentary on the scene it appears in” (qtd. in Youngquist 338). While the aliens come from the edge of the cosmos in search of Art Blakey’s records, they reject *Buttercorn Lady* in the hunt for something even more new and find what they’re looking for in aggressively avant-garde free jazz: “Space men wanted to know what happened after Blakey. They’d watched but couldn’t get close enough to dig exactly what was happening. Albert Ayler they dug immediately . . .” (128). The music of Sun Ra makes an even stronger impression on the blue people: “But when the Sun ra [sic] tape came on this blue dude really opened up. He dug the hell out of it” (131). Even Smokey Robinson “evolves,” moving beyond playing the clown in his 1965 hit “Tracks of My Tears”: “Smokey Robinson was on now. But straight up fast and winging. No more unrequited love. Damn Smokey got his thing together too. No more tracks or mirages” (130). Evolution is marked by a musical form that moves beyond a commercial appeal to the majority white audience and, in focusing on the needs of the Black community, Robinson escapes false consciousness—“mirages”—and makes forward progress—“winging.”

In creating a musical genealogy that moves from Blakey’s *Buttercorn Lady* (1966), to Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Smokey Robinson, and back to Sun Ra, with a fond look at Charlie Parker, Baraka weaves a paradoxically future-oriented sense of the past, where past, present, and future all merge into the literally universal language of black music. The geographic spread of these artists, from New York to Detroit to Alabama, further reinforces Baraka’s textual move of collapsing space and time. Music is the source, the register, and the space of his emancipatory imagination of the future. In other words, for Baraka, jazz can create a liberated (space)man in the here and now, but it cannot serve so specific a purpose for Dongala.



The act of rewriting Baraka's cosmically inflected, jazz inspired, revolutionary fable indicates Dongala's investment in African American music and the complexities of trans-diasporic identity formation.<sup>15</sup> Dongala's intertextual use of, and emendations to, Baraka's story suggests his discomfort with articulations of diaspora identity that were increasingly defined by cultural symbols. Specifically, in his reworking of the connections between jazz and political consciousness, Dongala challenges the understanding of jazz and diaspora identity as necessarily revolutionary. His suspicion of political understandings of cultural symbols emerges in his deployment of music in his oeuvre and the significance of science fiction in Africa.

Dongala's engagement with African American culture in this 1970 story anticipates his explorations of trans-Atlantic currents of black identity that flow both ways in his first novel, *Un Fusil dans le main, une poème dans le poche* (1975). As Koffi Anyinefa has so eloquently argued, this novel explores the ways in which both the diaspora has mythologized Africa and Africa has mythologized African Americans. Mayela, the protagonist of *fusil/poème*, says to his African American corevolutionary, "Africa is a reality for me, who is African, but a myth for you, who is Black American. This myth is perhaps useful, if not, you would not be here, when in your country the fight is just as difficult" (qtd. in Anyinefa, "Intertextuality" 62).<sup>16</sup> While Dongala rejects an easy identification, based in some version of Négritude (as Anyinefa asserts), or a romanticized, aestheticized sense of Pan-Africanism, he points to a shared parallel struggle and calls for a relationship of mutual aid in the fight. As Anyinefa says, "Mayela admits that the struggle of Africans for independence can inspire Black Americans in their own fight for civil rights and vice-versa, but he refuses to consider them as two aspects of the same fundamental struggle. For him, the Black American is not an alter-ego, but an Other" (63). A shared political rhetoric or a shared "Library" of ideological inspirations, as Anyinefa describes it in his essay, is not enough to confer a shared sense of self, not enough to bridge the middle passage.

However, Dongala places music in a different register than other cultural discourses of identity formation; he is willing to grant it a stronger and more (dare I use the word?) universal appeal, but stresses that this call does not engender the same response everywhere. In a 2002 interview, Dongala calls himself "regrettably young" when he wrote his first novel (published in 1975) and presumably the same would apply to "Jazz and Palm Wine," which was first published five years earlier (Schurer). In his interviews with Thomas, Dongala claims that the short stories were a way to gain some psychic breathing room in the period between his first and second novels. While this may be true for the first five stories in the collection, the last three are deeply rooted in American soil and at least two were demonstrably published before *fusil/poème* ("Jazz et vin de palme" in 1970 and "Mon métro fantôme" in the late 60s). Dongala's own narrative about their creation, that the stories represented a way to clear some mental space between the two longer projects, must be cast in some doubt. His American stories are a direct and immediate response to his feelings of attachment to and alienation from American and African American culture.

Anyinefa's assertion, then, that in *fusil/poème* Dongala casts the relationship between Africa and Africa America as one of self and other, not self and alter ego, opens up the question of why Dongala would rewrite a short story by an African



American writer famous for his experiments in postmodern racial nationalism. In 1967, when Imiri Baraka published his story "Answers in Progress," he was still known as Leroy Jones, but was on the verge of fully manifesting his own call to Pan-African pan-diasporic identity—via black cultural nationalism—most notably through his change of name in the very same year these tales appeared. "Jazz and Palm Wine" begins to give voice to Dongala's unease with simple transatlantic translations, later fully developed in *fusil/poème*. In rewriting Baraka's story only three years after it first appeared, Dongala questions the transparency of transatlantic deployment of identity effects through discourses of diaspora, Négritude, or New World formulations of Pan-Africanism and music.

As noted earlier, many sources point to the significance of Dongala's experiences as a student in the U.S. from 1960 until 1969, where he spent summers in Greenwich Village "hanging out with Black Panthers during the day and listening to Jazz at night" (Michaels). As indicated above, "A Love Supreme" (in English in the original) is a thinly disguised autobiographical account of the narrator's overwhelming sadness on hearing about the death of John Coltrane—called JC throughout the story—a deliberate reference to the almost religious devotion Coltrane inspired in his fans.<sup>17</sup> While Dongala's personal connection to jazz is apparent in this story as an emotive performative space—he calls John Coltrane's music "The artistic avant garde of our [black power and black panthers] battle" (*Jazz et vin de palme* 150)—he questions whether it was effective as political rhetoric:

What can we say about those turbulent years of the 60s?, when we talked of the liberation of the black man, of stopping the exploitation of man by man? These words, those grandiloquent and weary cries hurled in the face of the world, did they really mean anything concrete? But you, [Coltrane] when you said your music was a source of life, a means to elevate men so that they might realize their dreams in life, that was not empty rhetoric. (151, my translation)

For this narrator, at least, art is not sufficient to concretize a political revolution, but is an individual affair. He goes on, however, to imply that art can awaken individuals to new ways of seeing, new ways of thinking about their collective good.

In this, Dongala seems to be echoing Baraka's belief that music can literally create the possibility of newness and an inherently optimistic sense that there will be an embodied future for the black subject. But Dongala's use of jazz and aliens in "Jazz and Palm Wine" runs exactly opposite to Baraka's use of music and science fiction. In rewriting Baraka, Dongala has the aliens land in Brazzaville. Instead of sanctioning a new black nation, they become just another colonizing power in a long list of occupiers. In African diasporic discourse, as British culture critic Kodwo Eshun points out, "The idea of slavery as an alien abduction means that we've all been living in an alien-nation since the eighteenth century" (qtd. in Weheliye 29). The African Americans are always already the alien abductees taken in ships to a strange new world by strange beings wielding a technological advantage. But for the Africans who remained behind, it was not a question of being abducted by aliens, but rather of being alienated while still at home. In order for Baraka to claim the future, the aliens must be reimagined to be on his side, to sanction the black revolution. In Dongala's story, the aliens reverse the revolution.

Just ten years after independence, they are now conquerors and despoilers of revolutionary hopes. They do not represent progress or evolution, but a kind of regression to the colonized state from which Africa, at great cost, had just emerged. Dongala's narrator does not want to engage in any kind of exchange of knowledge with the aliens. He wants to be rid of them. Where jazz functions as a bridge or open line of communication for Baraka—Youngquist's homing beacon—for Dongala, jazz is a tool of mystification, befuddlement, and, ultimately, when used in synergy with palm wine, the technology that turns the tide against the aliens. It is, in other words, not a sign of kinship with the aliens, but a weapon to be used against them. Jazz's cosmic power is not verified through recognition by the space men, but by its dominion over them. Jazz and palm wine, taken together, save the African revolution.

Dongala is very much interested in rescuing the African revolution of the 1960s. In his interview with Brezault and Clavreuil, he calls the 60s a time of "terrible euphoria" and describes it as when the new nations felt that "we had history on our side" (135). But by the 80s, that euphoria had changed into a kind of pessimism encapsulated in the question, "Is there a future?" This pessimism comes out even more strongly in a recent *New York Times* editorial about responses to the Rwandan genocide. Dongala laments that African intellectuals have stood by and watched their leaders hijack the revolution:

Today, I still think the genocide in Rwanda has not been the electroshock that should have jolted me and other African scholars from our "Africanly" correct way of thinking. . . many academics and leaders in Africa are reluctant to speak out because of a misplaced sense of solidarity. We are also reluctant to face other unpleasant realities because we are afraid that would project the wrong picture of Africa to the world. ("The Genocide Next Door")

He goes on to single out Sekou Toure, Robert Mugabe, and Paul Kagame as leaders whom it is not "acceptable to criticize, for doing so would be siding with the white settlers." Their moral legitimacy, garnered during the revolutionary phases of their careers, has rendered them sacred figures, immune from criticism of their increasingly autocratic regimes.

Dongala's willingness to speak out against those who would undermine the legacy of liberation is central to all his work. Just as Baraka's space fantasy of the African American revolution, sanctioned and witnessed by the cosmic alliance of "blue(s)" people, is surely critical of the American systems of capitalism, (in)justice, and citizenship (among other things), Dongala's parable of what happens when the aliens come to earth, starting with Brazzaville, is equally disapproving of the short-sighted parochial interests of the post-independence African governments that have betrayed the promises of the African revolution. And Dongala is happy to dole out the blame. The story is certainly critical of the African leaders, who can do nothing but cower under the onslaught of the alien invasion or even pursue their own civil wars while their neighbors are under siege from outer space. It is equally concerned, though, with how European powers use the occasion to once again work out all their own issues against the backdrop of African suffering. When faced with an invasion from outer space, the U.S. and the Soviet Union stage a stereotypically Cold War debate:

The United States proposed what they call saturation bombing, the system of carpet bombing that they first tried in Germany, especially Dresden, and then later perfected in Viet Nam. Too bad if a couple of locals lose their skins. . . . Russia, on the other hand, was for the tried and true method of the massive intervention of cannons and tanks that had worked so well for them in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. (196)

France, meanwhile, seeks to reassert its preeminence as a global diplomatic actor by warning everyone of the dangers of adopting the U.S./Soviet paradigm: "The French Delegate, representing France, the eternal champion of the Third World, . . . warned the assembly not to accept any solution that was exclusively Russo-American, that this would be even more catastrophic than the menace that was currently threatening the world" (198). It takes a Kenyan elder to suggest a palaver with the invaders, lubricated by palm wine. When scientific research indicated that the combination of palm wine and the music of Coltrane and Sun Ra induces catatonia in the aliens, the earthlings now have an opportunity to study their conquerors at length.

While Dongala spends a great deal of this narrative mocking the post-imperial or neocolonial posturings of the Western world powers, he makes a point of reminding the reader that this particular invasion starts in Brazzaville and comes to take over the entire world. After ten years of world domination, headquartered in Brazzaville, the aliens announce a festival to celebrate the anniversary.<sup>18</sup> During the official program "speeches were made that exalted the courage, scientific achievements, intelligence, wisdom, etc., of the conquerors from space without which the Earth would not have been what it was that day" (123). But while the fantasy of the revolution spreading from Brazzaville, at first glance, could be mistaken for the kind of synergistic mutual support of Baraka's blues people, Dongala's African leaders treat the aliens in exactly the same ways, using exactly the same discourse, they did their former colonial masters. He has the acting president of the OAU give a keynote speech during this celebration marking a decade of the intergalactic empire, by saying:

We are, we earthlings, all cultural hybrids on the cosmic order trying to assimilate the best of both worlds. From one side, the immense intellectual and scientific gifts of our illustrious friends, the rulers of the universe that shines from Vega and Sirius; and from the other side, the earthly culture wherein everything is based on the binary rhythm of day and night, a culture of moon light (the time for love, sex, and other non-scientific activities) and a culture of sunlight (the time of solitude, alienation, and scientific activities). (123-24)

This is perhaps Dongala's strongest critique of the African leaders and certainly one that resounds with his critiques of Négritude's influence over cultural nationalism in the African sociopolitical order immediately after independence. In echoing Senghor's (in)famous dictum, "we are men of dance, whose feet get stronger as we pound upon the firm ground," and contrasting African emotion with Hellenic reason, Dongala is clearly casting doubt on cultural nationalism as a mode of resistance.

In this parody of the accommodationist rhetoric of the colonial period, the story "Jazz and Palm Wine" is unmistakably a pointed critique of post-independence

African leadership, especially in its appeals to cultural nationalism. But even while Dongala rejects a facile call to cultural symbols, he is willing to grant music a role in mobilizing affect that can be shaped into political action. Like Baraka, Dongala does let the common man triumph, but his is not a result of the concerted effort of the blues people, as comprised of Baraka's cosmic alliance of the African diaspora and symbols of evolution from outer space. Dongala's is one of worldwide humanity triumphing over the extraterrestrial other and it is effected through the simultaneous worldwide broadcast of the music of John Coltrane, which renders the aliens docile, and then a switch to Sun Ra, which revs everyone up with deleterious effects on the invaders, "As soon as he [Sun Ra] gained the speed of light, everything that was not human evaporated into space" (125). Dongala ends this story with the assertion "and so Jazz conquered the world." And it does so by separating the human from the nonhuman, the earthly from the non-earthly.

Jazz conquers the world through an entirely terrestrial understanding of the laws of physics and a quintessentially human technology—music—for harnessing them. Evolution comes not from linking up to outer space, but from a careful attention to the earthly tools of palaver, music, and palm wine. Dongala, in effect, brings the music of Sun Ra back down to earth, as a bodily pleasure akin to the drinking of palm wine. Where Baraka wants to create the alien nation of Black America, Dongala wants to overcome the alienation of colonialism perpetuated by the neocolonial post-independence regimes. Unlike Baraka, Dongala does not seek to imagine radically new spaces, but to reclaim those in which he already is. The leaders of single-party Congo were right to be suspicious of the messages in Dongala's stories, but more so this one, I think, than the others in the collection, the more straightforward contemporary realist narratives that recount the everyday impediments to individual liberation in Congo. In rewriting Baraka's dream of the revolution, Dongala places it in a future time and place far, far away; instead of having it witnessed and encouraged by brothers from another plant and the future, Dongala advocates revolution against the status ante/quo, even if it means overthrowing your brothers.

## NOTES

1. This is certainly not unique to Baraka. Many theorists of the black arts movement in the 50s and 60s took inspiration, tropes, and symbols from African culture, for example, Maulana Karenga and his work on African American traditions, best known through his creation of the holiday of Kwanzaa. In his monograph on the Black Arts Movement, James Smethurst characterizes Maulana Karenga's work of the early 60s as having an "emphasis on mythology and the need to essentially create new ahistorical or prehistorical African traditions that were mythologically or spiritually true but not necessarily rooted in historical practice" (83–84).

2. See Olaniyan.

3. In his 1979 essay "Littérature et société: Ce que je crois" (published as part of a collection honoring Mongo Beti), Dongala makes a similar distinction between revolutionary politics and aesthetics: "En politique, une révolution est une transformation totale, souvent brusque et violente, dans la structure économique, sociale et politique d'un pays. Est révolutionnaire qui participe à ce bouleversement. Un livre, un roman ou un poème révolutionnaire est un texte qui fait éclater les structures de la tradition littéraire, qui apporte une nouvelle sensibilité, une nouvelle façon de voir, de lire,

d'appréhender les choses. Ces deux aspects ne sont pas nécessairement convergents." 'In politics, a revolution is a total transformation, often abrupt and violent, in the economic, social, and political structure of a country. Anything that participates in that overturning is revolutionary. A revolutionary book, novel, or poem explodes the structures of the literary tradition and brings a new sensibility, a new way of seeing, of reading, of understanding things. These two aspects don't necessarily converge' (59–60). He goes on to give several examples of aesthetically revolutionary writers and texts that were far from so in their politics (Joyce, Céline, Einstein).

4. In several interviews, Dongala describes the collection as widely read (see Michaels) and even claims that his editor described it as the best-selling title in Hatier's "Monde Noir poche" series (see Magnier).

5. The only story to have been translated is the title story, which was incorporated into a Longman's anthology of "African short stories" (edited by Willfried Feuser), also named for Dongala's story "Jazz and Palm Wine." The permissions page for this collection lists the original publication for the story as "Jazz et vin de Palme," having appeared in *Présence Africaine* 73.1 in 1970. Ironically, Dongala has claimed that he never gave permission for either the translation or the republishing (Thomas 222n31). Another story from Dongala's collection, "A Love Supreme" (in English in the original), was recently staged as a musical about the death of John Coltrane in a Parisian theater.

6. In email correspondence with the author, Dongala explains that even though he did not meet Baraka in person until 2005, he avidly read his work, both creative and scholarly, throughout his stay in New York in the 1960s.

7. Donagala claims that his was the first African science fiction text (email to the author).

8. See specially Michaels, where he describes his early years in the United States.

9. Dongala's assertion that he published this story in English before he returned to the Congo in 1982 is discussed in a longer version of the Brezault and Clavreuil interview reproduced in the comment section of "Le Blog de Kangni Alem." Thomas describes this as "a short story published in the late 60s" and cites it as "The D Train," but doesn't list the site of publication or an exact date. Dongala later confirmed that this was a direct rewrite of Baraka in a private email.

10. This trope of the plight of the black population, as witnessed by an extraterrestrial observer assumed to be sympathetic, recurs throughout African American discourse, especially in the film *Brother from Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1984). More recently, *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009) recounts the arrival of aliens in contemporary South Africa and creates an unstable parallel between the aliens, who are restricted to closely guarded "resettlement camps," and the black population under apartheid. The film ultimately restages a white liberal crisis of conscience in the face of apartheid when the film's protagonist, a white, mid-level bureaucrat, finds himself faced with the dilemma of an (alien) family destroyed by his policies. He spends the rest of the film renouncing his own (Boer) family and trying to reunite an alien father and son, while slowly mutating into an alien himself.

11. Youngquist's description of Baraka's use of jazz echoes other critical statements on Baraka's deployment of it. Jurgen Grandt, for example, describes Baraka's understanding of jazz as necessarily revolutionary: "Thus, the jazz aesthetic's revision of the past . . . is accompanied not only by the possibility of violence and violence. It also contains a utopian impulse in its struggle towards that metaphorical place of freedom . . ." (67).

12. Koffi Anyinefa notes that Bernard Dadié's 1964 novel, *One Way*, contains a passage where the narrator muses that Americans ought to include a black star in their flag to reflect the black American contributions to the founding and building of the nation ("Hello and Goodbye," 58–59).

13. Baraka's own work asserts this and most of his critics concur. Grandt, Smethurst, and Youngquist, for example, all take Baraka at his word and trace the impact of blues and jazz on his work. Grandt qualifies this by arguing that Baraka develops a more ambivalent relationship to African American music beginning in the 70s. He argues that Baraka was threatened by the move of jazz away from its traditional African American roots to a more internationally inflected music. See Grandt 108–09. Smethurst similarly describes Baraka's distaste for certain strands of jazz in the early 70s, when he "polemicizes against Jazz musicians relying too heavily on the European art music tradition . . . at the expense of the blues and rhythm and blues" (63).

14. See, for example, Bould; Smith; Youngquist.

15. For a discussion about Dongala's ambivalent treatment of diaspora discourses in his novels, see Anyinefa, "Intertextuality"; Thomas, ch. 5.

16. In his 1988 interview with Chemain, Dongala asserts that in the 60s, African Americans traded one stereotype of Africa, Tarzan, etc., for another, the cradle of humanity. Both he says are equally mistaken and difficult for an African, with knowledge of what is really happening on the ground, to respond to.

17. While Dongala's satiric short story "Jazz and Palm Wine" ends with what, at the time, must have seemed an almost sacrilegiously fanciful notion of Coltrane being named a saint, there exists, in fact, a fairly serious and widely accepted church dedicated to Coltrane still operating in the San Francisco area.

18. It's almost irresistible to read this as a parody of the first "Festival mondial des artes nègres," held in 1966, eight years after most of the former French colonies gained their independence via the 1958 referendum. President Leopold Sedar Senghor's opening address for the festival stressed the "values" that African art could bring to the "civilization of the universal," including poetry, spirituality, and dignity.

## WORKS CITED

- Alem, Kangni. "Emmanuel Dongala: 'à quoi sert un écrivain en Afrique?'" *Le Blog de Kangni Alem*. Le Blog de Kangni Alem, 30 Aug. 2006. Web. 12 Oct. 2007.
- Anyinefa, Koffi. "Hello and Goodbye to Négritude: Senghor, Dadié, Dongala, and America." Trans. Grace E. An. *Research in African Literatures* 27.2 (1996): 51–69. Print.
- . "Intertextuality in Dongala's *Un Fusil dans la main, un poème dans la poche*." *Research in African Literatures* 24.1 (1993): 5–17. Print.
- Bould, Mark. "The Ships Landed Long Ago: Afrofuturism and Black SF." *Science Fiction Studies* 34.2 (2007): 177–86. Print.
- Brezault, Alain, and Gérard Clavreuil. "Emmanuel Dongala: 'Rire pour ne pas pleurer.'" *Notre librairie* 92–93 (1988): 135–38. Print.
- The Brother from Another Planet*. Dir. John Sayles. Cinecom Pictures, 1984. Film.
- Chemain, Arlette. "Une Écriture plusieurs fois renouvelés: Emmanuel Dongala." *Notre librairie* 92–93 (1988): 134–35. Print.
- Dabla, J.-J. Séwanou. *Jazz et Vin de palme de Emmanuel Boundzéki Dongala: Étude critique*. Paris: Editions Fernand Nathan, 1986. Print.
- Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel L. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 92.4 (1993): 735–78. Print.
- District 9*. Dir. Neill Blomkamp. Tristar, 2009. Film.
- Dlamini, Victor. "Podcast with a Renaissance African, Emmanuel Dongala." *Books Live*. Times Media Group, 21 Apr. 2008. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
- Dongala, Emmanuel. *Un Fusil dans la main, un poème dans la poche*. Paris: A. Michel, 1973. Print.



- . "The Genocide Next Door." *New York Times* 6 Apr. 2004 late ed., East Coast: A23. Print.
- . "Jazz and Palm Wine." *Jazz and Palm Wine*. Ed. Willfried Feuser. Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1981. 194–202. Print.
- . *Jazz et vin de palme*. Paris: Hatier, 1982. Print.
- . "Littérature et société: Ce que je crois." *Peuples Noirs/Peuples Africains* 9 (1979): 56–64. Print.
- . "Re: Query from a Scholar Working on 'Jazz et vin de palme.'" Message to the author. 25 Sept. 2011. Email.
- Ellison, Ralph. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: The Modern Library, 1995. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2000. Print.
- Grandt, Jurgen. *Kinds of Blue: The Jazz Aesthetic in African American Narrative*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2004. Print.
- Jones, Leroi (Amiri Baraka). "Answers in Progress." *Tales*. By Jones. New York: Grove Press, 1968. 127–32. Print.
- Magnier, Bernard. "Emmanuel Dongala: Des nouvelles entre deux romans." *Afrique Noire* 111 (1992): 33–34. Print.
- Mcleod, Ken. "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism, and Meaning in Popular Music." *Popular Music* 22.3 (2003): 337–55. Print.
- Michaels, Julie. "Writer in Exile." *Boston Globe Magazine*. New York Times Company, 6 Feb. 2000. Web. 15 Mar. 2011.
- Olanian, Tejumola. "Thinking Afro-Futures: A Preamble to an Epistemic History" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108.3 (2009): 449–57. Print.
- Schurer, Norbert. "Emmanuel Dongala: Writer between Words. An Interview." *Xavier Review* 22.2 (2002): 41–54. Print.
- Sinker, Mark. "Loving the Alien—Black Science Fiction." *The Wire* 96 (1992): n. pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Smethurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2005. Print.
- Smith, Darryl. "Droppin' Science Fiction: Signification and Singularity in the Metapocalypse of Du Bois, Baraka, and Bell." *Science Fiction Studies* 34.2 (2007): 201–19. Print.
- Tal, Kali. "'That Just Kills Me': Black Militant Near-Future Fiction." *Social Text* 20.2 (2002): 65–91. Print.
- Thomas, Dominic. *Nation-Building and Propaganda in Francophone Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002. Print.
- Welhiye, Alexander. "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music." *Social Text* 20.2 (2002): 21–47. Print.
- Youngquist, Paul. "The Space Machine: Baraka and Science Fiction." *African American Review* 37.2–3 (2003): 333–43. Print.